

## *Arab Rule in Sindh after the Umayyads*

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The Arab conquest of Sindh in 712 A.D. opened a new chapter in the history of the region. Initially, it was ruled by the Umayyad governors. Later, in 750 AD, the Umayyad caliphate was replaced by the Abbasids,<sup>1</sup> with Abul Abbas al-Saffah (750-754) as the first Caliph. The new caliph directed Abu Muslim Khurasani, the governor of Khurasan, to take over Sindh from the Umayyad governors. At that time, Manzoor, the brother of Mansoor, and the administrator of Debal, was ruling over Sindh as an independent ruler. After he was killed in an encounter with Mughallas Abi Sijistani, sent by Abu Muslim, Mansoor came out from Mansura and succeeded in arresting and killing Mughallas. These developments led to the despatch of Musa bin Kab to Sindh as the new governor, with the mission to establish central authority there. Mansoor, however, was not ready to give in easily. A fierce battle ensued, and Mansoor was defeated. He fled towards the Indian desert, where he was killed in pursuit in 759 A.D. by Musa's men.<sup>2</sup> In 758, Musa appointed his son, Aniya, as incharge of the province. After Musa's death, Aniya rose in rebellion. In the ensuing encounter between Aniya and Umar bin Hafs, the new governor,<sup>3</sup> Aniya was captured and sent to Baghdad but he managed to escape on the way. He was however, eventually killed.<sup>4</sup>

The next governor was Hisham bin 'Umar Saghlibi who was appointed in 768. Meanwhile, the situation in the region had continued to deteriorate, becoming conducive to all sorts of adventurers from the mainland of the Abbasid Caliphate. Among others, it attracted the Yamanis and Hijazis who found it difficult to pursue their insurgencies in their respective regions

because of the stringent Abbasid control. Thus, the Indian part of the Caliphate tended to become an open arena for tribal conflicts, creating an extremely chaotic situation in the region and making it impossible for the governors to govern effectively. Multan came in for special attention of some Arab adventurers who succeeded in establishing an independent Arab emirate over there.<sup>5</sup>

However, in a hotly contested battle, Hisham, the capable and energetic governor of Sindh defeated the new ruler of Multan, restoring Multan back to the Caliph's dominion in 771.<sup>6</sup> Moreover he consolidated his gains and gave peace to the strife-torn region. His feats, both as general and administrator, induced the Caliph to place Kirman region under his control.<sup>7</sup> In 772 C.E. he left for Baghdad and was succeeded by Mabad bin Khalil.<sup>8</sup>

The situation in Sindh was fairly stable when Caliph Abu Jaffar Mansur (754-775), the real founder of the Abbasid Caliphate, died in 775 A.D. and was succeeded by his son al-Mahdi (775-785). Al-Mahdi being a mild ruler, the previous stringent state control came to be somewhat diluted. In consequence, malcontents had a field day. Thus, during the tenure of the new governor, Ruh bin Hatim (776-780) the Jats rose in rebellion, but were crushed.<sup>9</sup> During 777-780 unrest was seething all the time and the region was disturbed, leading to rapid transfers of governors. Lais bin Turaif, the new governor, requested Caliph Mahdi in 782 for strong reinforcements.<sup>10</sup> Musa Hadi who succeeded Mahdi (d.785) and preceded Harun (786-809), was a weak ruler. Also he had much to pre-occupy him with his designs to eliminate Harun from the line of succession, with the result that he could devote little attention to the affairs of the state. The situation in far-flung regions like Sindh was bound to deteriorate.

The reign of Harun al-Rashid, an extremely able and energetic ruler, is usually acclaimed as the most glorious period of the Abbasid Caliphate. Soon after accession, he decided to bring the situation in Sindh under full control. The governors he sent one after another, however, failed to bring Sindh back to normalcy, till Daud bin Yazid bin Hatim Muhallabi took over.<sup>11</sup> He dealt with the recalcitrant elements with a very heavy hand, crushed their resistance, killed a good many in several battles

and skirmishes, and expelled many more from Sindh. Thus, peace came to be established in the region after a long time, and the Abbasid authority was reasserted.

Interestingly though, during the devastating civil war between al-Amin (809-813) and al-Mamun, Sindh continued to enjoy a measure of peace and stability, if only because of Daud Muhallabi's administrative capabilities and acumen. He continued to head the administration of Sindh till his death in 820 A.D., when he was succeeded by his son, Bashar<sup>12</sup> who was also able to manage the region effectively. But the rather long hold of the family over Sindh seems to have misguided him into entertaining hopes of becoming independent of the Caliphate. His revolt in 828 was crushed by the Abbasid forces under Ghassan, and he alongwith his entire family, was sent to Baghdad as prisoners. He was however, treated graciously by Caliph Mamun, who freed him and his family members, and invested him with royal gifts and favours.<sup>13</sup>

Mamun attached great importance to Sindh as a province of his vast caliphate; hence he sent Musa bin Imran, a scion of the great family of vazirs and administrators, the Barmakis. Musa administered the province effectively and consolidated his control so well that the Kharaj increased to one million dirhams.<sup>14</sup> He was also able to tackle some of the neighbouring powers which had been causing problems for Sindh. One such ruler was captured and killed.<sup>15</sup> After his death in 835, the new Caliph, Mutasim Billah (834-842), confirmed his son, Imran, as governor. Imran crushed the Jats during the same period in the western region, invested Kikan, the centre of the rebellion, made it a military headquarter and named the new city al-Baiza.<sup>16</sup> He collected the Jats and revived the old custom, initiated by Chach (652-91), which stipulated that the Jats, being the lowest caste in the society, were forbidden to carry arms and wear silk garments. Moreover they had to walk about bare-headed and bare-footed and to take a dog along whenever they ventured outside their homes and to ride horses without saddle. Only their chiefs were allowed to use coarse cloth on the back of the horse. They were required to provide firewood for the kitchens of the nobles, and to guide travellers and provide them with food if they stayed for the night.<sup>17</sup>

Imran made preparations for crushing the revolt of Meds and Jats, and, for this purpose, he took the help of other Jat tribes. He however, could not succeed due to the mutiny of the local Arab tribes who were themselves engaged in internecine fighting. In his encounter with the rebellious Arab tribes Imran, was assassinated by the Nazaris, whose leader, 'Umar bin 'Abdul 'Aziz Habbari, would later become the founder of the Habbari dynasty of Sindh.<sup>18</sup>

The new Caliph, al-Wasiq Billah (842-847), confirmed Anbah bin Ishaq appointed earlier by Caliph Mutassim Billah on his post.<sup>19</sup> A good administrator, Anbah succeeded in improving the law and order situation.<sup>20</sup> He reconstructed the ruined Buddhist temple of Debal and converted it into the central jail. In 848 he also repaired the ramparts of Debal.<sup>21</sup>

Al-Wasiq Billah's successor Caliph Mutawakkil (847-861), had his own ideas about administration and made drastic changes. Thus Anbah came to be dismissed and Harun bin Abu Khalid was appointed as governor in his place.

Reaching Sindh in 850 A.D. Harun exerted himself to control the situation and checkmate the activities of the Hijazis, but was killed in an encounter in 854 A.D. The leader of the rebels, 'Umar Habbari, sent the Caliph a petition, requesting him to assign Sindh to him. In the circumstances, the Caliph thought it expedient to accede to his request.

### **Habbari Dynasty (854-1026 A.D.)**

The Habbaris had to their credit a long list of accomplishments in the political and intellectual fields. According to Ibn Khaldun, members of this Arab tribe had been employed in the government both by the Umayyads and the Abbasids.<sup>22</sup> This family is said to be an off-shoot of the celebrated Arab tribe of Quraish. One of the members of the Habbari family, Manzar bin Zubair, migrated to Sindh in 738 A.D.<sup>23</sup> A grandson of this Manzar was 'Umar bin Abdul Aziz Habbari (854-884),<sup>24</sup> who managed to establish independent rule over Sindh in 854 A.D. He, however, continued to recognise the Abasid Caliphs and had the khutba recited in their name.

In 870, Caliph M'utamad (870-892) appointed Yaqub bin Lais Saffari, as Viceroy of Sijistan, Kirman, Turkistan and also Sindh.<sup>25</sup> In 874, he assigned the territories of the eastern

provinces of his dominions to his brother Muaffiq, under whose jurisdiction the province of Sindh was also placed.<sup>26</sup> This would clearly suggest that though Sindh had become independent for all practical purposes, Umar continued to recognise the suzerainty of the Abbasids.

Umar was succeeded by his son, 'Abdullah Habbari in 884 A.D. Except for a few incidental lists of information, the sources are almost silent about him. During his tenure a serious revolt took place in which he lost his capital, Mansura; but was able to recover it before long.<sup>27</sup> According to Buzurg bin Shahariyar, on a request from a neighbouring Hindu Raja, 'Abdullah sent an Arab poet to teach the Quran in his court in the Sindhi language. He had also reportedly translated a portion of the Quran in that language which is counted among the earliest translations of the Holy Book. The poet returned from the Raja's court in 857 and informed 'Abdullah that the Raja had embraced Islam.<sup>28</sup> In 894, a serious earthquake struck the region, causing death to some 150,000 people.<sup>29</sup>

Ibn Athir informs us about the appointment of Muhammad bin Abi Shawarib as qazi of Mansura, who was sent from Baghdad in 896 A.D.<sup>30</sup> If this information is correct, then this suggests a rather complex relationship between the independent Habbari state and the Abbasid Caliphate,<sup>31</sup> which needs further investigation.

For how long did 'Abdullah rule is not known. However, Masudi says that Mansura was ruled in 915 by Abul Manzar 'Umar bin Abdullah.<sup>32</sup> Apparently his father Abdullah is 'Abdullah bin 'Umar bin 'Abdul 'Aziz (854-884), the previous ruler. Masudi also reports that "the territories of Mansura are large with fertile land. It has three lakh (300,000) villages. The main inhabitants of this region are Meds. They were fighting with the ruler." He, further, informs us that the army of the ruler consisted of 40,000 soldiers and 5,000 horsemen and eighty elephants. These elephants were used not only in the war but also for carrying loads and to draw chariots.<sup>33</sup> No information is available about the life and rule of his sons, Muhammad and 'Ali. Maqdisi has also words of praise for the Habbari rulers.<sup>34</sup>

Yaqut, who compiled *Mujma-ul-Buldan* in 987 A.D. says that the ruler of Mansura and Multan at that time was of Quraishi descent and the Khutba was read in the name of

Abbasid Caliph.<sup>35</sup> The Habbari dynasty (854-1026) ruled Sindh for 172 years. But little is known about the rest of the rulers, which leaves a big gap in our knowledge about the history of the region during this period.

### **The Banu Sammah Rulers of Multan : (Circa 893-968 A.D.)**

The family of Sammah bin Luwayy was an important Arab tribe, which had carved out for itself a niche in the history of the region and specially of Multan.<sup>36</sup> This family also reportedly belonged to the Quraish tribe. One of the scions of this family, Samah bin Luwayy, migrated from Makkah and settled in 'Amman where he succeeded in establishing his control over the political and administrative apparatus. About the same time several revolts, launched by the Kharijites, Shias, and Ismailis against the caliphate,<sup>37</sup> had turned 'Amman into a hot-bed of recalcitrance, and the 'Abbasid forces were unable to curb these elements. The 'Abbasid Caliph Mutazid (892-902 A.D.) therefore, decided to appoint Muhammad bin Qasim Sami as governor to suppress them. He set about his task with tact and determination; he defeated and expelled the Kharijites, and restored the entire 'Amman region to the caliphate.<sup>38</sup>

During the same period Muhammad<sup>39</sup> bin Qasim Munabbah established his rule in Multan. Ibn Rustah records that Multan was under the rule of the scions of Samah bin Luwayy. This means that Sami established his rule by the end of 892 or at the beginning of 893 A.D.<sup>40</sup>

Masudi, who visited Multan twenty three years after Ibn Rustah, mentions Abul Lahab Munabbah bin Asad Quyraishi as the ruler. Thus, within this short span, at least three rulers had already ruled over the region. Istakhri who came to Multan forty years after Masudi, found the kingdom prosperous. He records that the Arab rulers had adopted the local culture of the Sindhi rulers, especially in respect of their dress and ornaments. They wore ear-rings and allowed their hair to grow long. They had built a residence outside the city, which also served as the military camp. The rulers went into the city riding on elephants every Friday to offer congregation prayer in the Jami Mosque.<sup>41</sup> This means that the Arab rulers had tried to assimilate the local Sindhi culture.

According to these authorities, Multan was well populated. The majority of the Multanis were traders and businessmen, and the administration was generally in Arab hands. The city was an important commercial entrepot, where trade was brisk, commodities cheap, and people happy, hospitable, honest and well-behaved. Besides commerce, the main source of income was the offerings of different kinds at the Sun-Temple, which was administered with the help of a band of caretakers.<sup>42</sup> Multan was known as *Bait-uz-Zahab* or House of Gold. The region comprised more than 120,000 villages, besides bigger towns, like Barar, Durwin, Barid (including Qannauj). It was also the biggest of the Arab states in the region,<sup>43</sup> its boundaries reaching to the kingdom of Mansura in the South, and to Makran in the west; it was comparable to that of Mansura.<sup>44</sup> However, Istakhri considers the Multan kingdom to be one-half as large as Mansura, but finds provisions over there cheaper than those at Mansura.<sup>45</sup> The buildings built in teak wood and comprising several stories were as beautiful as those at Siraf.<sup>46</sup> In the centre of the rather spacious and crowded market complex stood the great Sun Temple, which was covered by shopping arcades of various shapes dealing in artifacts made of ivory and bronze.<sup>47</sup> In the neighbourhood of the temple stood the Jami mosque.<sup>48</sup>

Banu Munabbah's rule for about a century, brought not only material prosperity but also political and social stability to the region. The Sami rulers extended their territory by reducing Qannauj which was also a religious centre.<sup>49</sup> Such was the impact of Arab culture on the locals that both the Hindus and Buddhists spoke Arabic along with their mother tongue. The Arab rulers also adopted many local customs. Not only did they speak the local languages, but they also adopted local dresses and other aspects of social life.<sup>50</sup>

Evidently, the rulers of Multan were Sunnis. They practised and established religious law according to the Quran and the Sunnah. They paid their allegiance to the Abbasids as evidenced by the inclusion of the names of the Abbasids caliphs in the Friday and Eid *khutbas*.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Yaqubi, *Tarikh-i-Yaqubi*, II, (ed. M.Th. Houtsma) Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1883, p.407.
2. *Ibid.*, II, p.429.
3. Ahmad Ibn Yahya Ibn Jabir Baladhuri, *Futuhul-Buldan*, Cairo, 1932, p.431.
4. Yaqubi, II, p.488.
5. Yaqubi, II, p.99; Shamsuddin Muhammad Bashari al Maqdisi, *Kitab Ahsan al-Taqasim fi-Marifat al-Aqalim*, (ed. M.J.De Goeje) second edition, E.J. Brill 1906, p.435. Later the areas of Sindh and Multan came to be divided into three independent kingdoms. The southern-most part was an independent Arab state with Mansura as its capital; the central territories with Alor as its capital were entrusted to Hindu rulers; and in the north was the Arab state of Multan. Both the Arab emirates were independent in their internal affairs, but owed allegiance to the Abbasid caliphate, until the time their territories were occupied by the Ismailis in the closing years of the 10th century.
6. Baladhuri, p.431; Ibn Athir, *Al-Kamil fit Tarikh*, Vol. V, Beirut, Dar Sader, 1965, p.596.
7. Ibn Athir, VI, p.12.
8. *Ibid.*, VI, p.13.
9. *Ibid.*, pp.42, 48, 55, 114. (His transfer was not an act of punishment since he was transferred to Africa after the death of his brother who was governor over there).
10. *Ibid.*, VI p.83.
11. *Ibid.*, VI, p.184.
12. Ibn Athir, VI, p.362.
13. *Ibid.*, VI, pp.409, 420.
14. Abul Qasim, Ubaidullah Ibn Khurdadhbih, *Kitab all Masalik wal Mamalik* (ed. M.J. de Goeje), Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1967, p.57.
15. His name was probably Balachander; he was a non-Muslim ruler in the environs of Sindh. Baladhuri, p.431.
16. According to Baladhuri (p.432), the city was still surviving in 893 A.D. and its principal inhabitants were Muslim.



17. Baladhuri, p.432; see also Ali bin Hamid Kufi, *Chach-Namah* (ed. N.A. Baloch), Islamabad, 1983, pp.33, 163-64.
18. *Ibid.*, p.432.
19. Baladhuri describes it in the period of M'utasim (833-842) but, Yaqubi records it in the period of Al Wasiq (842-847). Most probably these developments took place during the last days of Mutasim and the early days of Al-Wasiq.
20. Yaqubi, II, 585.
21. Baladhuri, p.437.
22. Ibn Khaldun, *Tarikh Ibn Khaldun*, II, Cairo, 1284 A.H., p.327.
23. Yaqubi, II, p.389.
24. Umar, son of Abul Aziz, son of Manzar son of Zubair, son of Abdur Rahman, son of Habbar, son of Aswad.
25. Ibn Khaldun, III, p.328.
26. *Ibid.*, III p.326.
27. Baladhuri, pp.444-5.
28. Buzurg b. Shahriyar, *Kitab Ajaib ul-Hind*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1883-1886, p.3.
29. Ibn Athir, VII, p.465.
30. *Ibid.*, VII, p.489.
31. Qazi Rashid, *Kitab uz-Zakhair wa-Tuhaf* (ed. M. Hamidullah), Kuwait, 1959, p.37; For details see Qazi Athar Mubarakpuri, *Hindustan Me Arabon Ki Hukumat*, Delhi, 1967, pp.93-94.
32. Masudi, *Muruja al-Zahab wa Ma'adinal Jawahir*, I, (ed. De Courteille), Paris, 1859, pp.377-78.
33. *Ibid.*, I, pp.379-80.
34. Maqdisi, pp.480, 485.
35. Hamavi, Yaqut, *Mujma al-Buldan*, V, Beirut, Dar sader, 1957, p.211.
36. Musaib b. Zubairi, *Kitab Nasab al Quresh*, I, ed. (E. Levi Provencal), Cairo, 1953, p.13; Abu Jafar Muhammad b. Habib Baghdadi, *Kitab al-Mukhabbar*, Hyderabad Deccan, 1361 A.H., p.168.
37. Amir Ibn Makula, *Kitab al-Akmal*, Hyderabad Deccan, 1382 A.H., I, pp.39, 57, II, p.88.
38. For details, see Ibn Khaldun, IV, p.93.

39. Muhammad b. Qasim b. Munabbah b. Rabi b. Hatim b. Jassas b. Amr b. Baqqal b. Ajzah b. Sama b. Asad b. Mujzam b. 'Auf b. Bakr b. Amr b. 'Auf b. Ibad b. Unwayy b. Harith b. Sama b. Luwayy. Ibn Makula, I, p.120; see also Musab b. Zubairi, II, p.440.
40. Ibn Rusta, *Alaiq al-Nafisa*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1891, pp.135-36; *Mujma al-Buldan*, V, p.227.
41. Abu Ishaq Ibrahim al-Istakhri, *Kitab al-Masalik Wal-Mamalik*, ed. M. Jabir Abdel al-Hini, Cairo, 1961, p.104; see also *Mujma al-Buldan*, V, p.227.
42. Abdul Fida, *Taqwim al-Buldan*, ed. (D.E. Slane), Paris, 1840, p.350.
43. Masudi, I pp.375-76.
44. Maqdisi, p.478.
45. Istakhri, p.103.
46. Maqdisi, pp.480-81.
47. Istakhri, p.103.
48. Yaqut, V, pp.227, 419.
49. Saiyid Sulaiman Nadavi, "Muslim Colonies in India before the Muslim Conquest", *Islamic Culture*, XVII, 1934, p.613; see also *Islamic Culture*, 1935, p.438.
50. Istakhri, p.103.

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